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MR. OTIS' ORATION.



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ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE "YOUNG MEN OF BOSTON,"

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY,

M DCCC XXXI.

BY WILLIAM F. OTIS.

BOSTON:

CARTER, HENDÉE AND BABCOCK.

M DCCC XXXI.



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TUESDAY, JULY 5, 1831.

DEAR SIR,—At a meeting of the Committee of Arrangements of the “Young men of Boston,” for the celebration of the Fourth of July, it was “*Resolved*, That the thanks of this committee be presented to Wm. F. OTIS, Esq., for his able and interesting Oration delivered upon that occasion; and that he be requested to furnish a copy for the press.”

It is with much pleasure that we have the honor to communicate the above vote, and solicit your compliance with the request of the general committee.

In whose behalf we are

Your obedient servants,

DAVID KIMBALL,	} <i>Sub-Committee.</i>
CHAS. H. LOCKE,	
NEWELL A. THOMPSON,	

To Wm. F. OTIS, Esq.

WEDNESDAY, JULY, 6 1831.

GENTLEMEN,—I received your very polite and gratifying note of yesterday evening, requesting for the press a copy of the Oration delivered by me on the Fourth of July.

That note was obligingly handed to me in person by one of your committee, and I immediately complied with his request in giving him the copy, as spoken, in order to prevent any delay in its publication.

I have since thought that justice to the Committee of Arrangements and the “Young men of Boston,” who received my Address with such urbanity and attention, requires me to accompany its publication with a notice that the sentiments contained in it are those of an individual only, who would be the last to obtrude them upon any dissentient; but who, in the absence of all previous concert, and without the least intimation of any prevailing opinion, felt it his duty to address the audience in a spirit of candor, if possible, commensurate with their generosity, and relying upon their liberality, uttered his free and undisguised impressions, in the full confidence that no one, but himself, could be implicated in their character.

Yours, very truly, &c.

WILLIAM F. OTIS.

To DAVID KIMBALL,	} <i>Sub-Committee of</i>	
CHAS. H. LOCKE,		} <i>Arrangements.</i>
NEWELL A. THOMPSON.		

ORATION.

MY COMPANIONS AND FRIENDS,—

BEFORE we select a theme it will be well for each one to reflect and question the utility of this assemblage. What object? what advantage?

This is our Jubilee. We throw off all care, and uncover the heart for the refreshing showers of joy.

We have speeches every day. Orations are the most common things with us. And yet, instead of retiring under grateful shade, or responding the grand chorus of hilarity, we have busily crowded this sober house. And why? Is it for gratitude? We should seek our solitary closets; or these walls upon a yet holier day. Is it for exultation? Have we set up one of our number as a mirror to reflect our own perfections, or as a medium through which to behold the character of our ancestors boastfully exaggerated? No. Exultation is abroad, waving upon every hill, resounding through every valley. While we have set apart an hour to assemble as members of this vast confederacy, and undergo a national self-examination.

Let us then approach our country. Not awe-struck, but familiarly, recollecting that it is our country, and that we are the people thereof.

If, after all the precious blood that has been shed for our liberty, we were so lukewarm as to be content with a mere comparative superiority over the despotisms and aristocracies around us, we might, perhaps, exult. If we reasoned with the shortsighted policy of Europeans,—if we could hush the voice of poverty, bribe the discontented, disarm resistance the most patriotic, stifle opposition the most pure, and purchase the friends of the people with their own perverted gold, we might then exult as other nations do. If the increase, opulence, and prosperity of our country were all that we could wish, we might now exult as we have done.

But when we reflect that the essential, the peculiar principle of this happy country, the principle that all power resides in the people, emanates from the people, and is responsible to the people; that this principle, when at the very acme of its triumph, at the full tide of its glory, after its long, its prosperous, its unparalleled career, should be confronted, doubted, and denied even here, where we have ocular proof and continual demonstration of its benefit and efficacy, it needs no augury to pronounce an hour, of even this day, inauspicious for mere exultation.

I pass over the momentous manifestations of that principle which now agitate all Europe, and chafe the Asiatic shores. I overlook Paris, Warsaw, and

Athens. I behold this country alone, and ask how that great principle flourishes here? And I fear my answer must be, that it lacks husbandry.

We have felt too secure. The raptures of success, in our struggle for independence with the gigantic power of Great Britain, and our veneration for the character of the statesmen and warriors, under whose guidance our liberty was maintained, have charmed us into an unwary leisure and pernicious joy; and while, like lords of the princely domain, we have walked the stately halls which their arms obtained for us, have gloried in armorials and trophies, which their valor won, have caroused with our followers, quaffing the bowl to their memory, and joined with our minstrels in quiring their praise, the wily foe has been rallying the fragments of his forces, and occupies the mountains, watching to destroy us.

It is time now, therefore, to inquire into our resources, and to repair our condition to meet occurrences which admit of neither escape nor delay.

The cause of liberty is by no means sure. The year eighteen hundred and thirty does not exhibit a great and general victory, but a battle yet raging, and now as doubtful in result, as it will be decisive in its consequences. It is not the European alone, who should stand by as the anxious spectator of the conflict, and the relative of those engaged; we, too, are a party to the strife; our fields may next feel their ravages, our firesides next perish under their desolating revenge.

In this country, we have done with war; we have established our independence, and the scenes which

are now displayed in Poland, once reddened the fair landscape which we enjoy. We look back to the evils which now menace them; we recollect the tyranny which they now experience; and when we catch the joyful news of their hard-earned fame,—when we hear how boldly they advance, how bravely they repel, how contentedly they faint and die, we dream that we are reading our own history; we hear them re-echo our own groans, our own imprecations, and, thank heaven! our own shouts for success!

But we will not dwell upon these scenes. We wish to ascertain the fruits and consequences of our independence. We have sheathed the sword, but have we completed our revolution? have we amplified Liberty, and perfected our National System? have we done away with all useless form? have we broken down the walls of monopoly, and let loose the crowd of emulation to rush in and occupy the choice places? Or do some marks of servitude and vassalage yet remain? We are no longer slaves, but do we wear no badges of our old masters? Is not their livery yet discernible in the garments of which we are so proud? Are we not even at this day, bound with the forms and prejudices which we derived from them? Have we not a full share of national absurdities, political misances, and public abominations?

It is so: and why? Because liberty lies idle. We have it—but we hoard it. Liberty alone, is by no means what we have been accustomed to esteem it. Liberty is the means of National Perfection. We have worshipped it as the end.

Liberty is a plant of tenacious root, of inextinguishable vitality. But whether it shall shoot forth with vigor and overshadow the parched territory beneath, or whether it shall barely exist in a tame and unprofitable vegetation, depends upon the evening care and morning toil of the husbandman.

We have trusted too much to the vigor of this plant. We have left it too solely to its natural growth. True, we have venerated it; we have assembled around it; its buds, as emblems, have bloomed in our breasts; its foliage has shaded our sportive dances, sheltered our councils, and solemnized our prayers; but we have forgotten to cultivate it; and by that neglect, the purposes of our revolution, and the effects of our independence remain incomplete, and languish with a sickly and scarcely perceptible existence.

We have felt a delicacy in carrying out our system, which we should no longer feel. Time has proved its superiority. Why then should we check its operation, or doubt its durability? If we once give it full force, it will hurl from itself the particles which impede it, and crush down every obstacle in its course.

I do not mean to deny that the doctrine of the equal rights of man, and the supreme power of the people has made admirable progress; that we are better acquainted with the nature of our republic; and, as a whole people, that we are more confirmed in our confidence in a free government. But it must, at the same time, be acknowledged, that a few

unfortunate instances of popular preference, the unexpected exercise of discretionary power, and the alarming discoveries of profligacy and intrigue, where we had a right to expect purity and honor, have infected with doubt and consternation some of the firmest advocates of our principles.

The discontented even here are a party; even here, there is an outcry against existing abuse; here odious measures continue unredressed, and worthy families are beggared by proscription. Even here, the press unfurls her ever welcome banner, and gathers around her the hosts of opposition. The people are infallible! shout the majority. Yet behold how the people are deceived. The people are wise! yet they are circumvented. Vigilant! yet traduced. Consistent! yet capricious. Just and grateful! yet they have punished their innocent friends, and have forgotten the long tried affection of their faithful servants.

Were such the purposes of our Revolution? The effect of Independence? The offspring of Liberty? If so, wherein is the great merit of our system, and why should we exult?

Unparalleled as it is, ours is, as yet, an imperfect system. Its vast proportions were admirably calculated for symmetry and strength; its materials are hewn from the indestructible quarries of the native earth; our ancestors laid its ponderous foundations deep on the solid rock, and raised its stupendous columns far above the level of all surrounding edifices. Their Herculean efforts served to demonstrate the

possibility of the task ; they completed enough to insure the perfection of the design, when old age overtook them, and they died, leaving it for us to finish. Where they left it, there it remains ; idly waiting for some more patriotic generation to raise it to its destined height, while haply the moss and ivy leaf will stand for its inscriptions, and time, the destroyer, will outstrip the builder's hand.

We should be slow to attribute the imperfections which deform our system, to the system itself. There is no fault in the design ; no defect in the construction ; the site is well chosen ; the materials at hand, and all that is requisite to insure to our country a continual career of prosperity, an unfading vigor, an ever renovating youth, is a determination to eradicate the obstructions in the road, to tear down the antiquated scaffoldings, to abandon the miserable tools and cumbrous machinery, with which it has been surrounded, and with the strong arm of the people, to go to work.

This determination has long since been planted, and is now ripening into birth, and if the young men of the present day will patronise its growth, they may soon reap the fruits of National Perfection.

The first obstacle which presents itself to this determination, is a veneration for antiquity and its established customs. This is one of the badges of our ancient vassalage ; and it is difficult to conceive, how a principle retarding our celerity and so incoherent with the entire spirit and savor of our government, can exist.

We profess, that all our institutions are the most beneficial for the people. If they are so, why is not that fact enough to command our utmost veneration, and why should we look back into antiquity to overwhelm ourselves with any additional awe? There is nothing more useless than this sentiment. It adds no purity to real merit; its indulgence may give sanction to acknowledged abuse; it is allied to an ignorant superstition; it is a grovelling homage, extorted from imbecility to support usurped power; it is the common prop of every tottering throne; it has been urged and enforced as the silencing condemnation to many a patriotic appeal; it has sealed the lips and fate of the poor; has consigned the laboring classes to inferiority; has transmitted, unsubdued through generations, the fatal virus of political corruption; and has granted to every monarch and nobleman plenary indulgence to inflict at pleasure his feudal persecutions.

It is this blind, this idolatrous veneration, that has raised up in this country an implied obligation, at war with our express duty. It has given precedent its power; it has anointed the faults of our predecessors to be more holy than our rectitude; it has forbidden investigation, resisted inquiry, and defied the mediation of reason and common sense. It discourages enterprise, checks discovery; and pointing scornfully at each rising generation, bids them kiss the rod of its high authority.

Why should we venerate an earthly custom? Why, in this land of sunshine, where we can witness

the growth of every day, where there is no cause for concealment, no profit in evasion, why should we resort to our imaginations for a conviction that our reason would declare ? Why should we erect altars to an unknown deity, when there is neither tempest, famine nor plague to excite our superstition.

It is not only the established customs of antiquity, which lord it over our veneration ; the institutions, which we can trace to their origin and recognise as the work of our own hands, these also call upon us to fall down and worship them.

If any human institution were perfect, it would enforce its own duration. The sound sense of all mankind would uphold it. But if all our institutions are temporary, and must sooner or later be subverted, it is the part of wisdom either to provide substitutes, or to constitute them of so ductile a material that after ages may shape them to their wants.

John Locke and Thomas Jefferson carried this principle so far as to declare, that even the constitution of a nation should contain a provision for its stated expiration. Then why should we wring our hands when we bid adieu to these mouldering customs and crumbling institutions ? Why should we cling to them as the home of our childhood, and shed tears in beholding them recede, when we know that in winding down the broad stream of our country, we shall pass through many a happier clime and arrive at our inheritance in vales of Elysian fertility.

Shall we, then, confiding in ancient customs and institutions, idly abandon our country to its destiny ?

and suffer it to stumble and blunder with us in its progress? Or shall we go forward gallantly, as its pioneers? explore its future dangers, hew for it a broad and smooth path? anticipate its exigencies, and shape it to meet them with success.

If we yet hesitate, let us look at Europe and behold how she has drifted down the tide of eighteen centuries; ever changing, alternately receding or advancing, as she falls into the varying currents; now threatened with instant destruction, and escaping perhaps by sheer awkwardness; now on the very eve of refuge and prosperity, but plunging into the only strait encompassed with real danger; now pausing in the jaws of ruin, to meditate upon some idle fancy; now abandoning the path of her salvation, to gratify a vain revenge. It is revolting, it is sickening to behold her. Her lofty frame, her noble mind, her admirable accomplishments, serve but to deepen her degradation, and we mourn more bitterly the hopelessness of her reform.

To what eminence would she not have now attained, had her youth looked forward to futurity, unblinded by a superstitious veneration for established institutions: had they disregarded the watchwords "church and king," rejected the collars of nobility, spurned their golden coronets and jewelled stars, and aimed boldly at the good of the people and the amelioration of the world?

As it is, she has missed all her glorious opportunities; she has suffered unnumbered changes, utter and entire revolutions; has been overrun by almost all

the nations of the earth ; has wiped from her surface the vestiges of successive empires, and yet now presents an aspect, hideous with the leprosies of her Tiberian age, and reeks under the very symptoms, which provoked the mockery of the Goths.

For three centuries after the birth of our Saviour, Rome, the mistress of Europe, exhibited at once the most ignominious depravity, the most brilliant literary excellence, and the highest political grandeur. Nation after nation was successively reduced to her sway, and captive kings followed the triumphant chariots of her generals, through crowds of adoring people, and poured out the riches of their distant dominions into her insatiable treasury.

Christianity silently pervaded the corrupt multitude, whispered its grace into their obdurate souls, and after it had gradually increased, despite of opposition, to a fearful strength, and burned in the breasts of its tens and hundreds of thousands, it attracted then the regard of royalty, was decked out and dressed up in all the trappings of the antecedent idolatry, and presented to the Emperor himself. Still it was Christianity, and was recognised as such. Why then did that not produce a change in Europe ? Why did not that renovate the world ? The answer is plain ; Christianity, under Constantine himself, could not repress the veneration of the Roman people for their ancient institutions. The state religion was changed. Yet it was a state religion, and enacted with implied provision to be subservient to the pleasures, games, orgies, ceremonials, vices, luxuries,

assassinations, and all other abuses and outrages, which had always been practised, allowed, and approved, as the birthright and privilege of that people. Something more was requisite, — some plague, or flood, or famine ; something to quench utterly the old manners, and lay waste the whole surface of society for a new growth.

We step down another century, and find the barbarous nations, at first, withholding their customary tribute ; next, from slight and local skirmishes with the Roman tax-gatherers, augmenting the revolt with various fortune, accumulating strength, learning the art of success from continual defeat, then confronting and routing the veteran armies in the regular field : then redeeming their wasted provinces, driving whole legions beyond the Alpine barriers, and at last menacing the imperial gates, and exacting tribute from the proud city, which built her palaces with their spoils.

Next comes Theodoric the Goth, — the great, the christian Theodoric. We hope that he, in the supremacy of power, in the glow of victory, in indignation at the rankness and corruption of Rome, and in contempt for their idolatry, — we hope that he will revolutionize the country. But he spared the temples, sanctioned the games, tolerated the manners, venerated the ancient institutions, — and his dynasty was overthrown.

Italy, at the dawn of renovation, fell back into her original darkness, and became Rome once more. Again was she overrun ; again reclaimed, and at last submitted to the common destiny of Europe.

The great change was then complete. We saw the northern nations rise like an impetuous flood, until the earth seemed to sink before them. The Alps were overcome. The mountain gates were choked, and the overwhelming tide burst in wild torrents from their very heads. The waters rushed over grove and garden, hill and vale, city and country ; immersed the whole face of creation, and left not an olive branch for the dove of peace. But no sooner were they equally diffused, than absorbed, they sunk into the soil over which they had prevailed, and their slime, uniting with all that was foul, engendered a more monstrous progeny of the ancient abuse ! Hence arose gigantic cathedrals, huge castles, fiefs, benefices, vassalage ; despotism in fractions of every denomination ; bloody-handed religion, girt with the sword, usurping the sceptre, bestowing the crown !

Hardly had the northern nations subsided into their new domain, ere the Moors threatened them with as dire a destruction as themselves had inflicted. The universal danger and the general interest, attracted all Europe to the church, as the only common remnant and relation. Mahomet's ferocious Saracens had scoured Mediterranean Africa, leaped the dividing straits, overrun all Spain, and penetrated into the heart of France, before the Carlovignian hero humbled them in the bloodiest victory of the world.

Religion ascribed this preservation to the Creator ; but superstition, in blind gratitude, fawned upon the

servants of the altar, and the glory was given to them. Leo and his iconoclasts were abhorred as impious innovators, and the old perversions triumphed and prevailed.

We come now to an event, which has bound Europe as a precedent for more than a thousand years, in fetters, which, though lately shattered, even yet manacle her fair limbs.

The treacherous Pepin dethrones his master and places the stolen crown upon his own head ; and to establish his ill-gotten royalty, procures a confirmation from the Holy See, and presents himself to the people, sanctified with the same ceremonials, which the Emperors of old obtained from the Patriarchs of Constantinople. Thus we see the earthly church elevated to be the maker of kings, who, strengthened with her authority, awe their subjects into an acknowledgment of the right divine.

Here is an end to all hope from the new nations of Europe. Their independent soldiery, their voluntary associations, their free assemblies, their meritorious appointments bow before the idol of established institutions. Liberty is lost. The people are dumb. The world has receded, and the Emperors commence anew with Charlemagne.

To follow history from this period, we must descend into caverns of utter darkness. The fresh incursions of Huns and Normans from abroad, and the feudal system at home, drove mankind to the final consolation, and surrendered the last stronghold of independence into the pale of the church. Europe,

at this period, seems to slumber in the darkness and insensibility of midnight ; the sun of intellect seems totally eclipsed, and we shudder as the last pale ray is shut into obscurity.

But who can describe the glory of the succeeding dawn? What magic pencil can trace the quaint deceptions, the beautiful illusions, the glaring changes which the first transition from darkness spread before the enraptured sight?

The mists of ignorance, summoned from their unseen abodes, rise and disclose vast regions, soon to be kindled into busy life ; the doubtful outlines, the confused boundaries, become boldened into a real and fixed landscape ; mountain and sky unblended, paint the serene horizon, and the retiring clouds, flung into grotesque and fitful drapery, gild the scenery, which they yet obscure. The voice of man, the hum of industry, the choir of civilization strike the ear, and the desolate prospect, as if by some fairy wand, wakes into animation and glories in the gorgeousness of living day.

We behold the feudal castle perched on its airy height, its sparkling towers pinnacled with all the gaudy colors of heraldry, and around its gothic portal rallying the tenantry of unnumbered acres to follow their gallant young lord to the holy land. For him the king pours out his treasures ; for him the clergy offer up their prayers. The fairest hands have embroidered his banners : the holiest lips have consecrated his sword ; and he goes to cope with Saladin, — Palestine, the goal — Love, his reward.

We hear the clamorous schools and wrangling universities, vexed with litigious disputants ; rioting in subtleties, raging in syllogisms, and inflicting mayhem, torture and murder in every degree, with all the relentless weapons of logic.

Down from his lonely tower walks the nightworn astrologer, mourning the light that interdicts his further traffic in the stars.

The monk, the alchymist, each at his shrine, seeks his consummate treasure ; and the Venetian merchant struts on the proud Rialto ; while Venice, fair Venice, risen from the bosom of the sea, gilds her palaces with the riches of the East, and covers the Adriatic with her marine.

Europe is once more in motion, and again we hope for reform.

The Crusades, which impoverished the noblemen, elevated merchants to a respectable rivalry, enriched the cities by commerce, and relieved, by the absence of their oppressors, the few vassals who remained upon the soil ; but as the power of the nobles decreased, that of the monarchs augmented ; and the clergy stood ready to place their feet in either scale, while the people were regarded by all as the mere dust of the balance.

At length, after a barren interval, the age of Bacon, Descartes and Galileo commenced ; and human reason, after having been immersed in syllogisms four hundred years, began to walk abroad. Charles the Fifth now concentrated in himself the martial glory of Europe ; Henry the Eighth, in the qualms

of his tender conscience, established a church in England after his own heart, and with himself at its head, in lieu of the Pope ; Elizabeth soon followed with her coquetish tyranny, and after a century of more or less persecutions for Religion's sake, we find Charles upon the English throne.

His career is a part of our own history and familiar to us. He fell, and never was there a more decisive and entire revolution, followed by a more melancholy relapse. A commonwealth was so perfectly established, that Cromwell dared not accept the crown, proffered him by our transatlantic brethren. But no sooner was this master-spirit departed, than the old rule of family succession was applied, in the elevation of Richard. This was a most unfortunate and irremediable error. When we heard of it in the West, we would not hearken to it. He wrote us ; but in vain. We had experienced the greatest commercial prosperity under Oliver. He removed our disqualifications, exempted us from the onerous exactions wrung from the other colonies, and was the only ruler of England that ever had an adequate idea of our importance.

We were not ready, however, to submit to the son out of gratitude to the father. Such a submission implied that Charles the Second was the lawful king ; it sanctioned the principle of family succession ; and that principle wanted only a constructive sanction to awaken the old veneration for the established institutions. What was our surprise, then, in the midst of our republican congratulations, suddenly to

find ourselves the lawful subjects of the merry monarch, whose own admirable qualifications were aided by the counsel and advice of a Rochester. This was a relapse, for which we never could forgive our Eastern fellow-countrymen. Resistance was vain. We were too weak even to demand conditions: and although, under different pretexts, we postponed the proclamation of the king for a year, his tyranny had already enforced the most humiliating recantations of our political heresy.

We endured all things under the renewed monarchy until sixteen hundred and eighty-eight, when the spirit of Bostonians, oppressed beyond tolerance, made a desperate struggle, imprisoned the executive, attacked and carried the forts, took the king's ships, and overturned the government.

This revolution, though abortive in effect, like those which preceded, should always be held in dear remembrance by every Bostonian as the early indication of that spirit, which in seventeen hundred and sixty-five exhibited the brightest page of our history.

But why should we trace these examples farther? Why course down another age and apply our remarks to events of daily familiarity? The eighteenth century ends; and throughout the whole we look in vain for anything like a regular train of improvement. There is a want of design and foresight in the transactions. The gains are all incidental. The advantages are fortuitous; while the objects are generally criminal or vain, and the events unexpected and unsatisfactory.

But we invariably find the usurper availing himself of ancient customs and institutions to confirm his power; and we discover no more potent and infallible charm to procure acquiescence and allay discontent.

Had there been any previously concerted, well-organized plan for improvement in Europe, hardly have any ten years elapsed, without opening an opportunity for its introduction. But with them, all projects of amelioration have been stigmatized as treasonable plots; all popular schemes have been rejected as chimerical; while we have arisen under the foot of oppression, and without precedent or experience have attained an elevation hitherto regarded by them as visionary and utopian! But so far short is our present condition of the height to which we aspire, that we are as yet in comparative infancy; and so over-cautious are our respected guardians, so timid is the public sentiment, lest we should carry our principles too far, and depart too widely from the beaten track, that we hardly need expect to be stripped of our swaddling clothes until we have strength to tear them from our own limbs.

What perfection have European nations attained, that should lead us to respect their institutions? What falsehood do we discover in our own principles, what frailty in our own organization, that bid us recoil from a thorough experiment? We have a free religion, a free press, universal suffrage, and trial by Jury; and with such assistance, if we cannot walk safely and find our own way, neither could we

though ADAMS and JEFFERSON should arise this day from the dead.

Another obstacle to National Perfection is, a predominant influence of the Politics of Europe, and particularly of England.

There are no doubt good English works upon political economy; volumes of patriotic examples, and eloquent harangues against usurpation and abuse; but their tone is too tame for our atmosphere. Their object is, to reform a present evil; to prevent a single difficulty. They stop at a fixed line, and all beyond is chaos and obscurity. The conscience of a subject of that government must be quieted, before he can take a broad and universal view of the good of the whole human race. He must open the volumes of expediency; he must call upon his imagination to rally before him a host of angry consequences. He must balance the probability of success with the effect of defeat. This done, he strives, ably, ingeniously, triumphantly strives, to make the present equal to the past. He must pledge himself not to do too much good. He must not give the people more liberty than their education enables them to use with discretion, and must always provide that the people shall never determine how much that is. He must shudder at the imputation of "*Radicalism*" and Reform. He must make some allowance for human imperfection. He must take the world as it is, not as it ought to be. Finally, he must act upon the principle, "*Fiat justitia ruat cælum,*" provided nothing therein contained, shall be construed to af-

fect the prerogative of the king, the privilege of the nobility, the monopoly of elections, and the established church.

But the young American is not to be deterred from wholesome innovation by the cry of Radicalism and Reform. No lurking treason insinuates itself, unbidden, into his heart. Guilt seizes not upon his imagination. He may promote any succession, unravel any usage, attack any principle of the constitution, and, provided he can ameliorate, he finds a generous people ready to follow.

The fathers of his country's liberty were stigmatized as radicals. The signers of the declaration of Independence were contemned as innovators. And, instead of subverting the foundation of his country's glory, he feels, and knows that in all his aspirations for improvement, he is brushing away the decayed leaves and faded flowers, to hang fresh garlands upon the monument of his Washington.

A child of old England, America long felt for her a filial regard. One hundred and fifty years we were linked to her destiny. Through desolating wars, our arm was at her side. Our little treasury yielded her its annual harvest; our commerce poured out millions at her feet; our soldiers were honored in her ranks; our seamen in her ships; and she, the mother country, was the standard of national perfection. We believed, up to the declaration of Independence, that there was no other or greater liberty than the liberty of England; and all we demanded

of her, until the sword was drawn, were the rights of Englishmen.

The theory of her three estates was capable of plausible defence, and had sincere admirers: her division of the executive, legislative, and judicial authorities, was esteemed the guarantee of lasting power, wisdom and justice; her bill of rights seemed to include all the definitions of liberty; her *habeas corpus* act was an impregnable shield against oppression; her jury trials were the triumphant vindications of the innocent and free.

Added to the real merits of these institutions, the force of habit and a continual experience of their utility, endeared them to every Englishman, whether of the East or West. It is not wonderful then, that many of them have escaped that scrutiny, which new projects would excite, and that the impetus of their former popularity should have carried them some distance in our ascendant path.

From an analogy to the English, we have invested our Executive with a princely patronage, as if the recipient of the free gift of the people stood in need of further popularity.

In Massachusetts, we have adhered to their mode of representation. Principalities, Dukedoms, Counties, Boroughs and Corporations give the right to vote! The people are made for the towns, not the towns for the people! Such were the principles, and they yet remain. For they told us but yesterday in the people's hall, "Touch not the rights of these venerable corporations, which they have enjoy-

ed since the foundation of the country," and with such words, the people, the living beings, the responsible souls, whose rights are coeval with the foundation of the world, whose interests are for eternity, they are to be postponed to this strange partiality for bodies politic !

From them, too, have we derived *Im risonment* for Debt. Trampling on the bill of rights, we have arrogated to ourselves a jurisdiction over the misfortunes of innocent men ; and without even the shadow of a law providing such punishment, have erected in each county our human menageries, and peopled them with victims, in multitudes that would disgrace the dungeons of Otho's noblemen.

To that same source also, we may trace much of the personal asperity which vitiates our political differences, and which is alike the enemy of candor and truth, which compels us, from artificial consistency, to adhere to our errors, and enslaves the press to promote our adopted measures, whether right or wrong.

The influence of English Law upon our country, is a yet greater obstacle. There is a spirit among the people, which, at times, forces its way through every political prejudice. But the barriers of the law intimidate the boldest assailant. One noxious effect of this is, that instead of attracting due odium from the people, the Law has ever with a most professional dexterity, shifted off the burden of her reproach upon her unhappy disciples.

Let us recollect, in surveying the law of our coun-

try, how long the world lay under the dominion of the syllogistic system. The method of learning kept all mankind in ignorance ; and the faint light of that philosophy was not quenched by opposition, but was outshone and eclipsed by the superior radiance of reason. If we apply reason to our laws, they will soon become reasonable ; but if we indulge personal controversies upon a subject so abstract, the evil may be protracted and increased.

The common law must soon come under the unsparing hand of the reformer. Already it has received a deadly blow from the most unexpected quarter. One of her own courtiers, at her palace of Westminster Hall, has raised the ruffian steel against her, and she might with as much melancholy aptitude and classic pathos, as any hero of ancient or modern history, cast a dying look upon the lord chancellor and exclaim "*Et tu Brute !*"

Another, and perhaps the most serious obstacle to our progress towards National Perfection, is the influence of foreign literature and manners. Of late, even nobles have become authors. Byron's success made authorship quite *tonnish*, and a herd have followed in his path.

A fashionable novel has been found no despicable vehicle for the plausible doctrines of aristocracy. Fashion and folly have been ably portrayed as indications of a capacity for governing, and the imaginary phantom of intuitive genius elevating an idle rake to an equality with the man of industry, has

been brought forward with strong insinuations of reality.

The nobility have had their fancies for centuries, and the world has followed them. But now mankind are thinking, studying and inquiring. It is the age of intellect, and intellect will be the criterion of success and superiority. Here then is an interesting struggle. The great object of the higher orders, so called, is to circulate the belief that no industry or exertion can ever enable one of, what they call, the lower orders to ascend from his inferiority to an equality with themselves.

They do not pretend to define the great insurmountable characteristic ; but they allude to its close alliance with intellectual superiority. They assert that there is a certain exquisite apprehension, possessed by themselves, essential to perfection in any design ; and which, though imperceptible by the vulgar, always touches a responsive chord in one of their exalted degree. This undefinable trait is a portion of their nature, and pervades their persons, actions, manners and productions.

Endued with this magic power, they command, at once, all the keys of knowledge and wisdom. What the mechanic is taught by intense application at a profound lecture, they inhale with their champagne, perhaps at a fancy ball. At their stylish repasts they imbibe Newtonian principles, which would cost the mathematician months of painful calculation. They dictate immortal pamphlets, while under the hands of their valet. Hit upon expedients to re-

lieve the nation from its perplexing dilemmas while on their way to the watchhouse ; and awaken slumbering Europe to her imminent perils by a crack of their tandem whip.

Europeans who ought to know, have justly exclaimed, that it was marvellous with how little wisdom the world is governed. And what need of pains-taking politicians, and experienced financiers, if a race of gifted bloods can prescribe the law of nations, extempore, and can eviscerate, at a thought, the intricacies of coin, currency and the public funds. Why should we summon from their blest abodes, the shades of Sidney and of Junius, if Regent Street can usher from her Athenian club-rooms, the master-spirits of Pelham and Paul Clifford.

This combination between fashion and literature, to aid in maintaining the divisions of society, may have a pernicious effect even upon our own country, unless at once subjected to the ordeal of public scrutiny.

The charm of literature has rescued from disgust and oblivion ages of extreme depravity, and to this, rather than to any taste, its eager adoption by the higher orders is due.

But however captivating foreign high-life, however richly emblazoned with literature, the American, in searching there for his models, will commit the most grievous error. The character of the higher orders, if we may believe their own witnesses, is not only utterly heartless and immoral, but is entirely incongruous with the mode and tone

of our society. Rank is their deity. The first circle is the highest heaven; and that once possessed, the coldest crimes, the most appalling guilt are softened into pardonable extravagance, or smiled upon as engaging traits.

Nothing has ever blackened the human heart and seared the conscience more irretrievably than the manners of European high-life. Their errors, follies and violences have signalized other ages; this, they have blighted with the mildew of cold, contemptuous selfishness. Their wealth and privileges must be supported, if the laws are warped. Their luxury must be pampered, if the country mourns; they succeed if by subtlety; they triumph if by treachery; adroit in policy, cunning in ambition, they maintain their own preeminence, and sooner than relinquish the extortions of their birthright, they would sprinkle their palace floors with the blood of the provinces, and wash them with the tears of their own poor.

It becomes us to frown down all similarity to them. If we are rich and seek a European example, the star of Lafayette still sparkles in the east. If we are poor, our own Franklin has left us an example. He showed, that while cooped up within the humblest sphere, and bound to unceasing occupations, the human soul can range unfettered through the universe, can soar beyond the young eagle's play-ground, and follow in a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen.

We aim at National Perfection. Other people

may excel their ancestors, we aspire to anticipate and outvie posterity. With us is the choice, either by adhering to European maxims and institutions, under a vague and groundless estimation of their security, to make our history merely a modified repetition of time-honored abuse, or by following nature, reason and justice, to raise our whole population to an undreamt elevation of dignity and happiness. It is in vain for us to seek for security elsewhere than at home.

No form of government, no checks and balances, no predominant interest, no custom or institution, no fundamental principles of policy, can alone maintain that security. The great object for us to pursue is justice. Perfect justice, as individuals, as bodies politic and as a nation. We have power enough, — liberty enough, — though idle. Stimulate them to exertion, attain justice, then wisdom, virtue and happiness must succeed, — then shall we have National Perfection.

For this attainment we need not follow in any beaten track. In adhering to our old English prejudices, in rallying round European institutions, we chain ourselves to the beacon, which we should approach only to avoid. Justice will be a new attainment, and must be sought in a new path. A path to be discovered by retracing many steps, and to be preserved by the guides of religion and morality.

Do I seem to recommend violence? Far from it. Where supreme power is possessed, violence is superfluous. Violence has too long checkered the earth with

her fitful and fruitless tumults. But I do recommend determination. I do applaud a spirit of fearless and indiscriminate reform. I do place reliance upon the high principles of our country, and feel but little confidence in ancient forms. I would lay waste with the sword of reason, tempered in our own consciences; I would burn with the conflagration of public opinion, kindled in our hearts; I would rivet with the fetters of irresistible conviction, self-imposed by a voluntary surrender of our prejudices.

But I would seek no examples from barbarous customs, from abusive institutions, from corrupt policy, from heartless laws, from luxurious literature, or from profligate society.

If we seek examples for our country and for ourselves, let us resort to the new-created West. There the fountains are uncorrupted. There civilization meets nature unimpaired. There we can behold how the young armed American grapples with the wilderness, and thence we can return and imagine how our fathers lived. Europe presents much to our view, but America still more. There, liberty, like the buried giant, struggles beneath the trembling mountains. There, from aroused nations, swells a new murmur, like the "*sad genius of the coming storm.*" There, Scythia frowns again upon the devoted South, and the shade of Kosciuszko walks with the noon-day pestilence amid their affrighted hosts.

We need not envy the young Poles or the young Parisians the harvest of honor and glory, which they

have reaped, and are now reaping. There is work enough for us at home.

We can do much for Europe by doing more for ourselves. We must perfect our system, and show what liberty is worth: we must convince the rich and the poor that it is the fountain of justice, the source of prosperity, the safeguard of the citizen, and the foundation of national perfection. We must prove that it is incompatible with immorality and irreligion. We must signalize under liberty our respect for the public morals. We must purge our high places from the stains of profligacy, guard against the ineptitude of our own favorites, and consign to contempt and obscurity the intriguing sycophants, who dare to practise their Machiavelian deception upon an ingenuous people.

Do this, and the cause of liberty will be sure. Do this, and then, indeed, we may exult. Do this, and we shall establish our own emancipation, and stand ready to spread it over all the earth.

Do we suppose that we can shed our liberty upon other countries without exertion; and let it fall upon them like the dew which stirs not the leaf? No. Liberty must be long held suspended over them in the atmosphere by our unseen and unwearied power. The more intense the heat which oppresses them, the more must it saturate and surcharge the air; till at last, when the ground is parched dry, when vegetation is crisped up, and the gasping people are ready to plunge into destruction for relief, then will it call forth its hosts from every

quarter of the horizon ; then will the sky be overcast, the landscape darkened, and Liberty, at one peal, with one flash, will pour down her million streams ; then will she lift up the voice, which echoed, in days of yore, from the Peaks of Otter to the Grand Monadnock ; then will

“Jura answer through her misty cloud,
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud.”

We are asked upon what is our reliance, in times of excitement ; what checks have we upon popular violence ; what compensation for human infirmities ; what substitutes for bayonets, dragoons, and an aristocracy ? I answer, the Religion and Morality of the people. Not the Religion of the State. Not the Morality of the fashionable. Thank heaven, our house is of no such Philistine architecture ! Our trust, our only trust, is where it ought to be,—the religion and morality of the whole people. Upon that depends, and ought to depend, all that we enjoy or hope. Our strength is in length, in breadth, and in depth. It is in us, and must be felt and exercised by each one and all of us, or our downfall is doomed. For we are the people ; we are our governors ; we are the Lord’s anointed ; we are the powers that be, and we bear not the sword in vain. And upon us is the responsibility ; humble and obscure, domestic and retiring, secluded and solitary we may be, but ours is still the great national trust, go where we will, and to God are we one and all ac-

countable. Our responsibility is with us ; it weighs upon us ; it follows us ; it overhangs us like the dome of this house ; its universal pressure is the great principle of our protection. If the just rules of religion and morality pervade through all its parts, the prodigious weight is gracefully sustained ; but if vice and corruption creep in its divided circles, the enfeebled fabric will yawn in dread chasms, and crumbling, will overwhelm us with unutterable ruin.

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